Can Chaos Breed Serenity?

*The Ideal Perspective of Charles Fourier*

Charles Fourier (1772-1837) is said to be the most exemplary of all Utopian Socialist thinkers. He was born in Besancon, France during the Reign of Terror, a time which altered his perspective on life. As a child he was constantly being scolded by his Catholic parents, causing him to think that every action he made was a sin in the eyes of God. In my opinion, that is one of the greatest factors which led him to seek an ideal society. 

This idea of **Utopian Socialism** inspired many different attempts at reformation. While some thought it meant a community in which people could live in harmony, others, like Fourier, believed it was actually based around work ethic and conditions. Fourier was extremely opposed to industrialization because he thought that it was simply a passing phase, so indulging himself in it would just be a waste of time. Since several political figures of the time were focusing on industrialization, Fourier had to work even harder to make his thoughts known.

Although he managed to spread his ideas in a number of ways, two key factors allowed him to be one of the most important and well-known visionaries of the past century. First, he avoided falling into the trap of industrialization and allowed himself to be guided by the ideals of the French Revolution: liberty, equality, and fraternity. Living in France, most of the people around him were well aware of these principles and in favor of them. This gave him an advantage because he wasn’t forcing new ideas onto the people, but simply altering their own thoughts to benefit his cause. Second, he wrote. Yet, it wasn’t so much what was being written as the style of writing that captured everyone’s attention. While Fourier succeeded in falling under the stereotypical label of Utopian Socialists-confused, mythical, chaotic, and in many cases psychotic thinkers-it is clear in his writing that he was a very intelligent man and had a well thought-out plan. As this whimsical factor drew in more readers, it was the wisdom and abstract perspective that his writings offered which made them come back for more.

His perspective was based around a societal structure called **phalanxes.** Unlike many systems for organizing communities, these groups wouldn’t be split up by race. In reality, these groups were set up in order to preserve diversity. Each neighborhood could have people of entirely different cultures, but if they followed the plan Fourier had arranged, they could maintain the efficiency of a group of highly-skilled laborers working together. This diversity would also include a bridge over the gap between the rich and poor. He hoped for a community where “all the children, both rich and poor, [could be] lodge[d] together” and live in peace. (*The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*) While this idea seems completely ridiculous, it was quite appealing at the time.

The way these phalanxes were supposed to work was that everyone would work, the rich and the poor, in order to adhere to the principle of equality. Yet, the defining quality of these phalanxes was to be the working conditions. Labor would only be don’t in short increments of time, in order to make it seem more appealing. Fourier developed this idea after studying elements of human nature which became considered **laws of passion.** He realized that if he could somehow transform the close bonds people have with their loved ones and replicate what he felt was physical lust, he could apply these feelings to the less appealing tasks of life, making them more enticing.

Working conditions would be much better, causing workers to want to work instead of be at home, which Fourier considered to be a development towards a feeling of passion towards labor. He would also make reforms for social and moral problems, which brought him several followers. A majority of these people were women, looking for solutions to problems such as prostitution, poverty, and illegitimacy.

Although Charles Fourier appears to be a wonderful visionary with only the people’s best interest in mind, he did think of himself as he preached to the people. He called himself the **scientific prophet** of the new world, which brought him more support from people concerned with religion.

In the end, Fourier’s phalanxes were never created, yet the idea never died. To this day, December 18th, 1900, Fourier’s work is being avidly studied while other thinkers are trying to make sense of all his work and apply it in a way that can be used in our societies today.

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